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<ABH>*Abstract*<ABSTRACT>

In this article, some modern theories of humour are applied to the Breton lawyer and writer of prose, Noël Du Fail, who produces in French linguistically rather difficult texts containing tales which he presents as being told about the countryside and its colourful, talkative inhabitants. In the *Propos rustiques* (1547), the first and most accessible of these works, he reveals himself as a self-conscious humourist. Although he does write (within a complex framework) about discord and fights, employing oppositional humour, he includes in the central chapter (7) a narration by the character Pasquier, three major elements of which (the evocation of a character called Thenot, a description of a child's playthings, and a short poem praising the rustic life) can be seen as contributing to a mirroring or *mise en abyme* of Du Fail's predominantly gentle comic art. Finally, underpinning the chapter and indeed his work as a whole are figurative expressions which reveal that, although he undoubtedly owes much in theme and language to Rabelais, Du Fail deploys many images and figures of speech that

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<UFN> This article is based on a paper given at the annual conference of the International Society for Humor Studies in Utrecht, July 2014. I am grateful to Jonathan Patterson for his perceptive comments on an early draft of this article, and to the two anonymous readers for *French Studies* for their particularly helpful reports.

are not found in Rabelais and that may well reflect the influence of the region in which he is writing.

<ABT>

<TX>Noël Du Fail (c. 1520–1591) was a Breton and a member of the rural nobility from the Rennes area, some seventy kilometres from what had been the border with France. It was perhaps this very proximity that made the region resolutely Breton.<sup>1</sup> Du Fail nevertheless wrote in French, reaching out to the whole of his country. He followed a legal career and practised as a lawyer in Rennes, serving later in the Parlement of Brittany. His profession will have led him to observe with care the activities and disputes of country folk. In 1547 he produced under an anagram of his name a work not directly related to his profession, but surely partly inspired by some of his clients: the *Propos rustiques de maistre Leon Ladulfi Champenois*.<sup>2</sup> It was published in Lyon, by Jean de Tournes l'Ancien a printer who worked with major poets such as Maurice Scève and Louise Labé.<sup>3</sup> This linguistically and

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<sup>1</sup> See Michel Simonin, 'Présentation', in Noël Du Fail, *Propos rustiques*, ed. by Aline Leclercq-Magnien (Paris: Jean Picollec, 1987), pp. 7–25 (p. 8). Brittany was politically annexed to France on 4 August 1532.

<sup>2</sup> The edition used for this article, Noël Du Fail, *Propos rustiques*, ed. by Gabriel-André Pérouse and Roger Dubuis (Geneva: Droz, 1994), follows the text of 1549, the third edition of the *Propos rustiques*, revised by Du Fail himself, but incorporates some of the changes and additions made in the second edition by a friend of Du Fail, probably Jean Maugin. References to this edition are given in parentheses in the main text.

<sup>3</sup> Du Fail also wrote the short and somewhat less coherent *Baliverneries, ou contes nouveaux d'Eutrapel, autrement dit Léon Ladulphy* (Paris: Pierre Trepperel; Nicolas Buffet; E. Groulleau, 1548), and *Les Contes et discours d'Eutrapel, par le feu Seigneur de la Herissaye*,

stylistically difficult text is important as it is devoted, as few if any sixteenth-century French texts are, to imagining the conversation of peasants or *vilains* and their jocular storytelling.<sup>4</sup> Orality is paramount.<sup>5</sup> A whole section of society is evoked through the prism of humour, but with apparently realistic details. Henri Baudrillart praises Du Fail's selection of his characters' garb or gestures: 'il semblerait que ces personnages avec leurs attitudes n'ont plus qu'à sauter sur la toile'.<sup>6</sup> The humour admittedly distorts more than those who take the text as a sociological document seem to acknowledge.<sup>7</sup> However, Du Fail is contributing to the history of the peasant class.<sup>8</sup> The first chapter informs us that it is a holiday (p. 48): the four

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*gentilhomme Breton* (Rennes: pour Noël Glamet, de Quimpercorentin, 1585). In all three titles produced by Du Fail the emphasis is on oral delivery.

<sup>4</sup> On the originality of title and text, see Marie-Claire Bichard, 'Les Genres rustique et pastoral — quelques thèmes pastoraux chez un auteur rustique: Noël du Fail', in *La Pastorale française: de Rémi Belleau à Victor Hugo*, ed. by Alain Niderst (Paris: Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature, 1991), pp. 23–36 (p. 23, n. 3).

<sup>5</sup> See Kathleen Loysen, *Conversation and Storytelling in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century French 'nouvelles'* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), pp. 1–2 and Chapter 4, 'Les Propos rustiques', pp. 127–66.

<sup>6</sup> Henri Baudrillart, 'Un magistrat breton, gentilhomme rural: Noël Du Fail', *Revue des deux mondes*, 92 (1889), 109–38 (p. 121).

<sup>7</sup> Arthur de La Borderie links the text to real life ('Noël du Fail: nouvelle édition de ses œuvres et documents inédits', *Revue de Bretagne et de Vendée*, 36 (1874), 456–76, and 'Noël du Fail: recherches sur sa famille, sa vie et ses œuvres', *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 36 (1875), 244–98 (pp. 283–98)). Denis Baril reads the text as a fairly earnest representation of rural peasant society; see 'La Peur de la ville chez les paysans des contes de Noël Du Fail', in *La Nouvelle française à la Renaissance*, ed. by Lionello Sozzi (Geneva: Slatkine, 1981), pp. 513–23 (p. 514).

<sup>8</sup> See Gabriel-André Pérouse, 'Témoins du passé dans l'œuvre de Noël Du Fail', in *Regards sur le passé dans l'Europe des XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles: actes du colloque organisé par l'Université de Nancy II (14 au 16 décembre 1995)*, ed. by Francine Wild (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), pp. 255–64 (p. 262). For information on *vilains*, see Jonathan Patterson, 'Rabelais's

old men featured are free to talk.<sup>9</sup> There are various layers of speech and narration in the text, and a complex framework (rather as, say, in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*), with the four main country dwellers reproducing the words of others and being themselves introduced by the principal narrator, Leon Ladulfi, who frequently distances himself from them.<sup>10</sup> It is perhaps the most attractive and accessible of Du Fail's texts, and will be the focus of this article, in which use will be made of modern theories of humour that have not hitherto been applied to his work.<sup>11</sup> The argument will be that Du Fail encapsulates in the central chapter of the *Propos rustiques* (Chapter 7) the overall impression his humour makes on the reader. He does this by providing three episodes or elements in which he reflects on his comic art. They are the evocation of a character called Thenot, a description of a child's playthings, and a short poem praising the rustic life, which highlights the sentiments suggested by the work as a whole. It will finally be demonstrated that underpinning the chapter and typical of Du Fail's œuvre are popular sayings and figurative expressions, several of them unexplained until now

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Uncommon Villains: A Reinterpretation of *Quart Livre* 45–7', *Études rabelaisiennes*, 54 (2015), 97–113.

<sup>9</sup> On *festivitas*, see Marie-Claire Bichard-Thomine, 'Les Avatars du genre facétieux: facétie et eutrapélie chez Noël Du Fail', in *La Nouvelle de langue française aux frontières des autres genres, du Moyen Âge à nos jours*, 1: *Actes du colloque de Metz, juin 1996*, ed. by Vincent Engel and Michel Guissard (Ottignies: Quorum, 1997), pp. 122–35 (p. 131).

<sup>10</sup> See Madeleine Jeay's informative *Donner la parole: l'histoire-cadre dans les recueils de nouvelles des XV<sup>e</sup>–XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Montreal: CERES, 1992); on the 'composition "gigogne"' of the *Propos rustiques*, see especially p. 91. For a more simplistic view of the organization of the text, see Charles Dédéyan, 'Noël Du Fail et la structure des *Propos rustiques*', *French Studies*, 4 (1950), 208–15.

<sup>11</sup> The comedy of the late *Eutrapel* is arguably rather darker than the humour examined in this article. See Gilles Polizzi, 'L'Effet de la bigarrure: *Les Contes et discours d'Eutrapel* comme danse macabre', in *Contes et discours bigarrés*, ed. by Frank Lestringant (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2011), pp. 69–88.

and possibly regional. Throughout the article are parallels with Rabelais; these will not be developed at length, as there are already various critical works covering this ground.<sup>12</sup>

<P>It should be acknowledged at the outset that, however important the central chapter will be shown to be, however mild its humour, the *Propos rustiques* cannot easily be categorized. There are grotesque elements: for instance, Chapter 8 describes beggars who feign illness and disability (pp. 100–04). Neighbourhood disputes are depicted: the relatively lengthy Chapter 9 concerns a fight between the residents of Flameaux and those of Vindelless. The combat is preceded by sarcasm and verbal cut and thrust as lively as that between the cake bakers (*fouaciers*) of Lerné and the shepherds from Gargantua's realm (*Gargantua*, Chapter 25). There is a lengthy, Rabelaisian list of insults exchanged (pp. 118–20). Chapter 10, again relatively long, recounts how Mistoudin avenges himself on the Vindelless. With a blend of direct speech and action, it has oppositional humour at its core. Chapter 11 describes the 'Querelles entre Guillot le Bridé et Philippot l'Enfumé'.<sup>13</sup> The last two chapters are much more peaceful in tone.

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<sup>12</sup> For a survey of Rabelaisian themes in Du Fail, see for instance Jean Larmat, 'Variations sur des motifs rabelaisiens chez Noël du Fail', in *Rabelais en son demi-millénaire*, ed. by Jean Céard and Jean-Claude Margolin (Geneva: Droz, 1988), pp. 365–72. Elsewhere, Larmat suggests there is too much imitation of Rabelais in the *Propos rustiques* — a highly debatable opinion; see 'L'Évolution de la technique narrative dans les œuvres facétieuses de Noël du Fail', in *Poétique et narration, mélanges offerts à Guy Demerson*, ed. by François Marotin and Jacques-Philippe Saint-Gérard (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1993), pp. 429–40 (p. 432).

<sup>13</sup> Admittedly also, Du Fail's taste for evocation of combat continued beyond the confines of this work, into *Les Baliverneries*, published shortly after the *Propos rustiques* in 1548. The work abandons the exclusive focus of the *Propos rustiques* on peasants. The second chapter, full, like the rest of the text, of echoes of classical literature and extended images, is devoted to a fight between two men. Du Fail again proves adept at evoking movement and fighting tactics. See especially *Propos rustiques de Noël du Fail suivis des Baliverneries*, ed. by Louis-Raymond Lefèvre (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1928), p. 135.

Elsewhere, however, Du Fail depicts humane qualities such as tolerance and patience: the general impression the *Propos rustiques* produce is of a gentle humour. The characters reflect on the past, which they tend to see as preferable to the present. In Chapter 2 Anselme speaks wistfully of the days when, according to him, lawyers and doctors — and their fees — were not so prominent (p. 53) and people were simple in dress and habits (p. 52). In the following chapter Huguet speaks nostalgically of great banquets produced with simple ingredients before the importation of exotic spices (pp. 54–55). Chapter 6 evokes, rather improbably, an age in which men and women shared one big bed without mishap, as ‘les hommes ne s’eschauffoient de voir les femmes nues’ (p. 80). Lubin, deploring precocious sexual relationships in his own day, declares: ‘les enfans d’aujourd’huy ne semblent que nains au regard des anciens’ (p. 81).

The belligerence Du Fail occasionally evokes serves to throw these calmer moments of amusement and nostalgia into relief, reflecting the classical, Renaissance, and judicial taste for antithetical presentation of subject matter.<sup>14</sup> His use of humour in the less warlike passages, which predominate, can be illustrated in particular by the centre of the *Propos rustiques*, the seventh of the thirteen chapters of the text, entitled ‘De Thenot du Coin’, in which one of the older peasants, Pasquier, described by Ladulfi as a great joker and a generous man (p. 49), recalls for the others a character from his village. Emmanuel Philipot devotes seven pages to this focal point of the text.<sup>15</sup> The chapter demonstrates Du Fail’s attention to structure, but has not been frequently analysed since. The end of the previous chapter informed the reader that Thenot, in Lubin’s words, ‘fut fait en despit des autres, et vivoit à sa guise sans avoir regard aux façons d’autrui’ (p. 90). However, though certainly

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<sup>14</sup> Ladulfi’s address to the reader begins with a discussion of description *a contrario*, involving antithetical terms (*Propos rustiques*, ed. by Pérouse and Dubuis, p. 38).

<sup>15</sup> See Philipot’s *La Vie et l’œuvre littéraire de Noël du Fail* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1914), pp. 200–06.



eccentric, he is far from being a selfish character and embodies some qualities that Pasquier finds admirable.

<P>Thenot is a diminutive of the common name Étienne, and ‘du Coin’ can obviously mean ‘local, from around the corner’. Rather as he published his work under a pseudonym (Leon Ladulfi), an anagram of his real name, so Du Fail shows interest in etymology, whether specious or not.<sup>16</sup> He accordingly makes Pasquier explain Thenot’s surname: ‘Ainsi appelé du Coin pource que jamais ne sortit hors sa maisonnette, ou (pour ne mentir) les limites ou bords de sa Parroisse’ (p. 91). Pasquier, putting into words the simple man’s wish to connect name to function or habits, reflects something of the Renaissance interest in onomastics, as found for example in Marot, Rabelais, Ronsard.<sup>17</sup> The explanation of Thenot’s name is particularly amusing as he is juxtaposed in the very first sentence of the chapter with his uncle, ‘Thibaud le Nattier’. Thibaud is a maker of straw mats: he is designated by his occupation. The opening of the chapter suggests in this way that Thenot is characterized by his sedentary nature, whereas others have jobs they carry out. The fact that Pasquier sees fit to comment explicitly on Thenot’s particular attachment to his own house and garden throws Thenot’s especially home-loving character into relief, as Du Fail was of course writing in an age when, although some had to travel in search of labour, many people never left the place in which they were born.<sup>18</sup> Thenot’s love of his own home — the

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<sup>16</sup> See Mireille Huchon, ‘Le Propos linguistique de Noël du Fail’, in *Noël du Fail Écrivain* ed. by Catherine Magnien-Simonin (Paris: Vrin, 1991), pp. 111-25 (pp. 112-13), and Dominique Bertrand, ‘Autrement dire: les jeux du pseudonyme chez Noël du Fail’, *Seizième siècle*, 1 (2005), 257–66.

<sup>17</sup> See for instance François Rigolot’s study, *Poétique et onomastique: l’exemple de la Renaissance* (Geneva: Droz, 1977).

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Patterson is currently doing research on the poor in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and concludes that there was indeed a core of the population (male as well as female) centred on the village, but a larger section (predominantly male, though also

*casanier* element — and the predilection for rural values, form two related strands that are represented for instance in Joachim Du Bellay's *Regrets* or his *Divers Jeux rustiques* (also composed in Rome between 1553 and 1557, and published on the poet's return to France in 1558). They are part of the important anti-courtier movement in sixteenth-century France.<sup>19</sup> They link up with the pastoral strain of much French Renaissance literature, particularly poetry.<sup>20</sup> They are also found later in the century, during the Wars of Religion, for example in Guy Du Faur de Pibrac's *Les Plaisirs de la vie rustique* (1574) and in Nicolas Rapin's *Les Plaisirs du gentilhomme champêtre* (1575), dedicated to Pibrac.<sup>21</sup>

<P>Thenot is certainly not criticized in Du Fail's text for his reluctance to travel, since along with this feature goes Thenot's quiescent disposition, amusingly illustrated by an

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involving women providing capital or marrying) that was itinerant, moving around in search of employment. See for instance his "Viles personnes": The Plebeian Multitudes in Charles Loyseau's *Traité des ordres*, *The Seventeenth Century*, 31 (2016), 71–94. See also James B. Collins, 'Geographic and Social Mobility in Early-Modern France', *Journal of Social History*, 24 (1991), 563–77, who uses various examples and statistics from Brittany, and cites the case of Gilles Ruellan, a peddler from a village near Saint-Malo (Antrain) who moved geographically to advance economically and socially, and became a leading French financier (p. 563).

<sup>19</sup> See Pauline M. Smith, *The Anti-Courtier Trend in Sixteenth Century French Literature* (Geneva: Droz, 1966). Du Fail's awareness of the belligerence of peasants means that his work as a whole cannot be neatly slotted into this tradition.

<sup>20</sup> Compare the *Élégies, mascarades et bergerie* of Ronsard (Paris: Gabriel Buon, 1565) and the two versions of *La Bergerie* by Remy Belleau in verse and prose (Paris: Gilles Gilles, 1565 and 1572).

<sup>21</sup> See Guy Du Faur de Pibrac *Les Quatrains, Les Plaisirs de la vie rustique et autres poésies*, ed. by Loris Petris (Geneva: Droz, 2004). On Pibrac and poets inspired by him, see Loris Petris, 'La Philosophie morale aux champs: ethica, œconomica et politica dans *Les Plaisirs de la vie rustique* de Pibrac', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 107 (2007), 3–18. Pibrac and Rapin were both magistrates.

account of his dealings with birds, particularly jays.<sup>22</sup> This account can be seen as the first instance of Du Fail's reflecting on his comic art: it encapsulates the aims of the *Propos rustiques* and indeed of many types of comedy in general. In a description striking for its vivid rustic details, Pasquier explains that, although Thenot plants vast amounts of broad beans and peas (pp. 91–92) and protects them with netting, he is robbed of most of them by the birds. This would strike a chord with the modern amateur gardener.<sup>23</sup> Thenot finds the birds in his vegetable patch almost every day, but instead of driving them away takes pleasure in watching them coming and going.

<P>Thenot is far from reacting angrily in the way the neighbour suggests. He explains that he resembles those in dispute with well-spoken people (perhaps an oblique allusion to the chattering of the birds): belligerent before they see these people, they immediately befriend them when they meet. Similarly, when he sees the damage the jays have done to his peas, Thenot first wishes he could drown the birds in the river. However, when he draws near to them and watches them cleverly looking out for traps, then suddenly seizing some peas and flying off, he is placated, 'considerant qu'il est necessaire qu'ilz vivent par le moyen des hommes' (p. 92). He is unruffled, although he has to make ends meet. The birds themselves often nest in his roof and house and eat in his courtyard with his chickens and geese, 'où prens tel pasetemps quel un Prince souhaiteroit et à grand peine le pourroit avoir' (p. 93). It is worth remembering that this is a period in which writers such as Pierre

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<sup>22</sup> See Marie-Claire Bichard-Thomine's instructive work, *Noël du Fail: conteur* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001), for instance (p. 151): 'Les *Propos rustiques* font souvent place au récit itératif, qui condense en un seul plusieurs moments, plusieurs occurrences du même événement.'

<sup>23</sup> Eutrapel will have rather more success in his garden, in the last chapter of *Les Contes et discours d'Eutrapel* (Rennes: pour Noël Glamet, de Quimpercorentin, 1585), folio 216r–v. See Olivier Martin, 'Noël du Fail et le rôle social de la noblesse', *Mémoires de la Société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Bretagne*, 8 (1927), 257–76 (p. 274).

Belon were taking an interest in the natural world, describing, drawing, and cataloguing it.<sup>24</sup>

Thenot creates an agreeable atmosphere in his whole house and garden and takes pleasure in it.

<P>There is a parallel here with Du Fail himself, who often employs a gentle humour, of the sort that might be called ‘affiliative’ (positive and strengthening relationships), to use the terminology of Rod A. Martin.<sup>25</sup> The reader of Du Fail’s works often smiles with amusement, rather than laughing. Du Fail’s comic effects are more restrained than those of Rabelais, who frequently creates uproarious laughter in his characters and readers; Thenot forms a contrast with, say, the garrulous and unruly Panurge.<sup>26</sup> Even Mistoudin is content to avenge himself on the Vindelois by disguising himself as a ghost and making them fall into a ditch, ‘où de fortune l’eau estoit petite’ (p. 132). This is far from Frere Jean defending the Abbaye de Seuillé in Chapter 27 of *Gargantua* and inflicting wounds described in anatomical

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<sup>24</sup> See in particular Pierre Belon, *L’Histoire de la nature des oyseaux, avec leurs descriptions, et naïfs portraicts retirez du naturel*, 7 books (Paris: Gilles Corrozet, 1555). Belon writes of the jay: ‘Il se nourrist de toutes choses, & ayme bien fort les pois’ (vi, 290). There is a modern facsimile edition by Philippe Glargon (Geneva: Droz, 1997). On this interest in the natural world in poetry of the period, see Hélène Naïs, *Les Animaux dans la poésie française de la Renaissance* (Paris: Didier, 1961). I am grateful to Emma Herdman for sharing with me some of her current research into the presentation of birds in the Renaissance.

<sup>25</sup> Rod A. Martin, *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach* (London: Elsevier Academic Press, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> Relevant here are Mikhail M. Bakhtin’s famous *Rabelais and his World* (1965), trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Carol Clark, *The Vulgar Rabelais* (Glasgow: Pressgang, 1983); and Barbara C. Bowen, *Enter Rabelais, Laughing* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), and ‘Laughing in Rabelais, Laughing with Rabelais’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Rabelais*, ed. by John O’Brien (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 31–42.

detail.<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere in the *Propos rustiques*, a highway robber is described mildly as somebody who ‘demande l’aumone en l’orée d’un bois, attendant l’heure’ (p. 62).

<P>There are similarities between the captivating evocation of Thenot with the birds on the one hand and the effects of the Breton writer’s humour itself on the other. For instance, John Morreall writes of the power of comedy to quell negative emotions:

<XTT>Since emotions engage us with the situation we’re in and amusement disengages us, they tend to suppress each other. I can’t be afraid of you or angry at you — that is, feeling the emotions of fear or anger right now — and amused by you at the same time.<sup>28</sup>

<TX>This may be compared with the reference Thenot makes to people one dislikes and curses until one meets them. Affiliative humour disarms, relaxes; when one smiles or laughs, one tends to abandon negative emotions. At the centre of his text Du Fail in this way places an anecdote, a very appealing vignette, which is a *mise en abyme* of his craft, of the way his own gently humorous words and careful suggestion of rustic activities are often designed to soothe the readers and make them receptive to the virtues of the simple way of life he depicts, or, in Du Fail’s terms, to the cockerel rather than urban timekeeping methods (p. 66).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Rabelais’s satirical scope is, of course, wider, embracing religion, for instance, and his works and the interpretations they invite are much more of a mixture. Terence Cave remarks of the *Quart Livre* in particular, ‘There is no other sixteenth-century text where so many things are so strangely and so lucidly connected’; Cave, ‘Travelers and Others: Cultural Connections in the Works of Rabelais’, in *François Rabelais: Critical Assessments*, ed. by Jean-Claude Carron (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 39–56 (p. 51).

<sup>28</sup> John Morreall, *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 33.

<sup>29</sup> For the *mise en abyme*, compare Michel Simonin, ‘Le Propos de Noël du Fail’, in *Noël du Fail Écrivain*, ed. by Magnien-Simonin, pp. 22–33.

<P>The second *mise en abyme*, reflecting among other things the playfulness of Du Fail's humour and his fondness for country lore, is found in the same central chapter, when Pasquier moves on to recollections of his own childhood.<sup>30</sup> This is unusual in the *Propos rustiques*, where the characters tend to speak of other people.<sup>31</sup> There is an evocation of play that encapsulates the comic writer's art, given that humour has been frequently seen as ludic.<sup>32</sup> Pasquier tells of how, when he was young, he started to build a house with brushwood; Thenot helped him. There follows a list of objects and toys Thenot made for him, including a little wooden horse that reminds us of Gargantua's prank with his own wooden steeds (*Gargantua*, Chapter 12). Thenot entered into the spirit of the child's games and made life more pleasant for him.<sup>33</sup> Thenot's ingenuity in assisting the young boy was remarkable. As with his vegetable patch, where he erected netting and planted different crops, he proved highly skilled with his hands.

<P>Du Fail makes one enormous sentence embrace the child's playthings, the speculations of Thenot and his friend, and the final giving to young Pasquier of the firewood he had gathered, so he could take it home and show he was useful:

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<sup>30</sup> This episode rather goes against what Leona G. Bailey writes: 'Children are given comparatively little attention in *Propos rustiques*. [...] When children do appear, they are generally obedient, hard working, and imitative of the ways of their elders'; Bailey, 'Du Fail's Observations of Peasant Life in *Propos rustiques*', *South Atlantic Bulletin*, 41 (1976), 50–56 (p. 54), which builds on her '*Propos rustiques* of Noël Du Fail: A Critical Edition', PhD Dissertation, University of Kansas, 1971.

<sup>31</sup> See Bichard-Thomine, *Noël du Fail*, p. 113. She does not mention Pasquier's recollections of his own childhood as an exception.

<sup>32</sup> For instance, in Max Eastman's *Enjoyment of Laughter* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1936).

<sup>33</sup> The idyllic depiction of Pasquier's infancy is very different from the (later) examples in John Parkin's '*Les Enfants risibles: Comic Portrayals of Childhood in French Fiction*', *European Journal of Humour Research*, 4 (2016), 35–45.

<XTT>Le bon homme de son costé rapetassoit quelque bagatelle pour m'ayder, ou me faisoit un couteau de bois, un moulinet, une fusée, une fluste d'escorce de chastaigner, une ceinture de Jonc, une Sarbataine de seuz, un arc de saulx, et la flesche d'une chenevotte,<sup>34</sup> ou bien une petite arbaleste et le traict empenné de papier, un petit cheual de bois équipé à l'avantage, une charrette, un chapeau de paille, ou bien me faisoit un beau plumart de plumes de Chapon, et les me mettoit sur mon bonnet, au vieux busq; et en tel equipage suyvois le bon Thenot et son cher compere Triballory: lesquelz, congnoissans les choux et lard estre cuits (ce voyans par les Corneilles qui se retiroient des champs pour percher au bois, et du bestial qui desjà estoit mis au tect), s'en alloient le petit pas, disputans quelque matiere de consequence, comme de regarder par leurs doigts quand seroit la feste de Noel ou Ascension, car très bien savoient leur Compost; ou jugeoient de la serenité des jours subsequens par les bruines du soir, puis me chargeoient d'un petit fagot de bois qu'ilz m'avoient fait amasser, disans (en conscience) que jamais ne faut retourner à la maison vuyde, et que c'est le dire d'un bon mesnager. (p. 94)

<TX>Linguistic exuberance and verbal copiousness — see for instance the enumeration of playthings structured by the anaphora 'ou [...] ou bien [...] ou bien' and accompanied by the mention of the trees or plants used to make them — are deployed in the attempt to reflect the abundant activities of the characters and the many objects with which they surround themselves.<sup>35</sup> The imperfect tense indicates that this is a repeated series of actions. Wood,

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<sup>34</sup> If somebody fell asleep during his storytelling, Robin Chevet 'prenoit une chenevotte allumée par un bout et souffloit par l'autre au nés de celui qui dormoit' (*Propos rustiques*, ed. by Pérouse and Dubuis, p. 73).

<sup>35</sup> There are three comparably long sentences in *Les Baliverneries*, one conveying the frenzied activity of country women via a Rabelaisian accumulation of infinitives (*Propos rustiques de Noël du Fail suivis des Baliverneries*, ed. by Lefèvre, pp. 142–43), the other two, consecutive, devoted to 'madame la Goutte' (ibid., pp. 150–51). The enumeration of toys made for Pasquier may be compared with the list of tools in the *Baliverneries* (ibid., p. 147). For Gaël Milin, enumeration is typical of Du Fail: 'Noël du Fail refuse de construire, il énumère. [...] L'énumération n'est qu'un cas particulier de cette esthétique de la

more rustic, pastoral, and peaceable than metal, is shown to have multifarious uses, which Du Fail's syntax attempts to capture. Pasquier has a moment of vanity and the perspective shifts as he recalls the feathers in his cap; again the emphasis is on peacefulness as the plume adorns a child, not a military leader. 'Congnoissans', 'voyans', 'disputans', and 'disans' are present participles loosely linking parts of the sentence in a way remarked upon (in other passages) by A. J. Krailsheimer.<sup>36</sup> The employment of parenthesis, of which there are two examples here, is also typical of Du Fail's work and of his attempts to convey orality; it allows him first to espouse the meanders of speech and the wandering gaze by mentioning the crows and cattle so important in the peasants' horological observations, and secondly to comment on the veracity of the reproduction of the adults' injunctions. The sentence becomes more elastic and, in the second example, the possibility of irony creeps in (as frequently is the case with Du Fail's parentheses): Pasquier is perhaps not reliable in his recollections and his assessment of reported speech.<sup>37</sup>

<P>As he plays with the many new toys made for him, the young Pasquier takes himself to another plane, believing at least temporarily that the wooden objects are real knives, bows and arrows, carts, and so on.<sup>38</sup> The description is quite unusual in sixteenth-century French literature. Particularly noteworthy is the way the boy is taken seriously, not

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juxtaposition'; Gaël Milin, 'Les Baliverneries d'Eutrapel de Noël du Fail: étude historique et littéraire', *Annales de Bretagne*, 77 (1970), 533–96 (p. 595).

<sup>36</sup> *Three Sixteenth-Century Conteurs*, ed. by A. J. Krailsheimer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 203.

<sup>37</sup> For further details regarding Du Fail's use of parenthesis, see Pierre Jourda's preface to his *Conteurs français du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), pp. ix–xlvi (p. xxvi); Samuel Gatteño, 'The Theme of the Golden Age in the *Propos rustiques*', *Romance Notes*, 18 (1977), 375–81 (p. 378); Loysen, *Conversation and Storytelling*, pp. 156–59.

<sup>38</sup> See Dominique Bertrand, *Dire le rire à l'âge classique: représenter pour mieux contrôler* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1995), pp. 126–28, and Nelly Feuerhahn, *Le Comique et l'enfance* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1998).



laughed at and belittled. Thenot encourages him, places himself on the boy's level. This is a much more down-to-earth and far less scatological variation on Grandgousier's praising of Gargantua for his invention of *torcheculs*, in *Gargantua*, Chapter 13. <P>When it is time to go home, Thenot and his friend Triballory wander back, discussing when Christmas or Ascension will be (counting on their fingers and basing themselves on their thorough knowledge of almanacs) or deciding with the earnestness of those who live off the land what the weather will be like for the next few days.<sup>39</sup> Du Fail's other characters are depicted as living close to nature: elsewhere peasants discuss the best times to plant crops, according to such things as the phases of the moon (pp. 57–58), and there is an enumeration of natural signs, including the behaviour of animals, which act as the basis for prognostications (pp. 66–67). These peasants have the practical knowledge that is reflected in the *littérature agronomique* of this period and later, in works such as Charles Estienne's *L'Agriculture et maison rustique*.<sup>40</sup> Later, Olivier de Serres's *Le Theatre d'agriculture et mesnage des champs* was equally popular.<sup>41</sup> The apparently casual chat of Du Fail's characters in fact shows that they are up to date with the country wisdom and taste of their times.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Du Fail implicitly signals to the reader that he is part of the literary vanguard.

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<sup>39</sup> Philipot detects a Virgilian echo here, of *Georgics* II. 527: see *La Vie et l'œuvre littéraire de Noël du Fail*, p. 203.

<sup>40</sup> Charles Estienne, *L'Agriculture et maison rustique* (Paris: Jacques Du Puy, 1564), re-edited by Jean Liébault in 1567 and appearing many times after that in enlarged versions. The subtitle of the 1567 edition (also Paris: Jacques Du Puy) proclaims that the reader will find in the text how to 'prevoir les changements & diuersitez des temps'.

<sup>41</sup> Olivier de Serres, *Le Theatre d'agriculture et mesnage des champs* (Paris: Jamet Mettayer, 1600).

<sup>42</sup> On chatter in the *Propos rustiques* as representing collective memory and communal lore, see Richard L. Regosin, 'Monkey Business: Imitation and the Status of the Text in Du Fail's *Propos rustiques*', in *Narrative Worlds: Essays on the 'Nouvelle' in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century France*, ed. by Gary Ferguson and David LaGuardia, Medieval and Renaissance

<P>The whole episode involving Thenot shows that Du Fail's laughter tends to be tolerant, embracing those of all ages, going against those who, like Hobbes, would see humour as fundamentally aggressive.<sup>43</sup> The comic moment in the same chapter, when the adults write on the hearth with sticks burned at the end, presumably urinating on it (pp. 94–95), also illustrates this point.<sup>44</sup> This recalls the description of Gargantua's father, Grandgousier, in front of the fire, writing with a stick (*Gargantua*, Chapter 28). Via this echo, the episode in the *Propos rustiques* reaches back another generation.<sup>45</sup>

<P>In sum, the way the boy Pasquier plays in the woods and fields is, first, akin to what readers of Du Fail's text do, suspending disbelief and opening themselves up to enjoyment and discovery.<sup>46</sup> Secondly, the otherwise somewhat indolent Thenot proves industrious in fashioning for the young Pasquier a world of make-believe, rather as Du Fail himself constructs the rustic universe of his work as a possible means of escaping the

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Texts and Studies 285 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), pp. 59–75 (p. 67).

<sup>43</sup> See for instance, on humour as aggression, Charles R. Gruner, *The Game of Humor: A Comprehensive Theory of Why We Laugh* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1997). The opposite view, that jokes are a form of play, is expressed by Christie Davies in *The Mirth of Nations* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002); for a summary, see p. 227.

<sup>44</sup> This micturition-based interpretation seems more convincing than Pérouse and Dubuis's reference to a mysterious gesture of Christ in John 8. 8 (*Propos rustiques*, ed. by Pérouse and Dubuis, p. 95, n. 17). Philipot suggests that writing on the hearth with a stick was a diuretic (*La Vie et l'œuvre littéraire de Noël du Fail*, p. 204, n. 1).

<sup>45</sup> On the temporal strata in the text as a whole, see Gabriel-André Pérouse, 'Le Dessein des *Propos rustiques*', in *Études seiziémistes offertes à Monsieur le Professeur V.-L. Saulnier par plusieurs de ses anciens doctorants* (Geneva: Droz, 1980), pp. 137–50 (pp. 140–43).

<sup>46</sup> See Bruce Wilshire, *Role Playing and Identity: The Limits of Theatre as Metaphor* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); for instance, p. 24. See also Eric Weitz, *The Cambridge Introduction to Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 5–7.

pressures of everyday urban life. This day in Pasquier's life is therefore the second internal mirroring of Du Fail's art to be found in Chapter 7.

<P>The third and final example of mirroring in Chapter 7 also recalls Rabelais, who places an inscription in verse at the main door of his Abbaye de Theleme, specifying the sort of people who should keep out and who should enter (*Gargantua*, Chapter 54). Reminiscent of this, though shorter, simpler, and not abusive, is the little poem that somebody who has heard of Thenot's praiseworthy life is said to have written in charcoal, not for an abbey, but more prosaically on Thenot's door. Yet another voice intrudes into Pasquier's account. In three archaically fashioned verses of six short lines each, with the first line of each verse rhyming with the second, fourth, and fifth lines, rustic life is praised, with the suggestion that it can be as valuable and as worth recording in writing as life at court and in town.<sup>47</sup> Du Fail stresses the peacefulness, harmony, and, despite the pillaging birds, more or less self-sustaining nature of Thenot's existence in order to advise the reader — who would be moderately erudite and perhaps connected to the court — that one does not need to stray far from one's birthplace to find contentment; on the contrary.<sup>48</sup> Once again, this time more overtly, Du Fail provides with the poem a humorous sub-text reduplicating aspects of his craft.

<P>Indeed, he conveys his sentiments about the virtues of the countryside through his language itself.<sup>49</sup> He is especially interested in proverbs, popular sayings, figurative expressions, and oaths of the sort one might well imagine country folk such as his narrators

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<sup>47</sup> On a possible source for this poem, see Philipot, *La Vie et l'œuvre littéraire de Noël du Fail*, pp. 205–06.

<sup>48</sup> See Philipot, *La Vie et l'œuvre littéraire de Noël du Fail*, p. 129.

<sup>49</sup> See Emmanuel Philipot, *Essai sur le style et la langue de Noël du Fail* (Paris: Champion, 1914).

employing (although many are surely modified for comic effect).<sup>50</sup> It is easy to read them without noticing they are proverbial. Many are not to be found in dictionaries; some are doubtless regional. An example from Chapter 7 is the following, referring to Thenot and Triballory: ‘Lesquelz assemblés en contoient en dix huit sortes’ (p. 93), which resembles the English idiom meaning ‘to talk volubly’: ‘Once they got together they talked nineteen to the dozen.’ Furthermore, Thenot du Coing takes the young Pasquier by the hand while chatting to Triballory (who is described, somewhat surprisingly, as an ‘homme fort rusé et asseuré menteur’), and persuades the boy to say to each of them ‘mille beaux mots’ (p. 93), where the hyperbole produces a smile in the reader. However, Pasquier’s mother dislikes this new vocabulary: she chides Thenot, who is clearly encouraging her son to swear. She plays the scolding female role that medieval farces made popular.<sup>51</sup> Initially she employs antiphrasis: ‘Par mon serment, compere Thenot, vous avez bonne grace d’ainsi bien apprendre mon filz à parler! vrayement je vous suis fort atteneue!’ (p. 93).<sup>52</sup> Thenot responds by exclaiming elliptically, ‘Oui, dea de beaux!’, echoing the previous ‘beaux’ and meaning roughly, ‘Yes indeed, well spoken’ (with heavy irony); compare the modern ironic, ‘C’est du beau’. He chides her for objecting to the language he and Triballory are teaching the young boy: ‘Laissez nous faire tous deux, et nous ferons de beaux bleds à moytié!’ (p. 93). Gabriel-André Pérouse and Roger Dubuis gloss this as: ‘Thenot s’amuse à feindre que le gamin est son

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<sup>50</sup> See Romain Weber, ‘Contribution à l’étude du lexique des *Propos rustiques* de Noël du Fail: l’obstacle des locutions’, *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance*, 65 (2003), 249–73. Bichard-Thomine provides a very helpful classified list of other proverbial expressions (*Noël du Fail*, pp. 413–583).

<sup>51</sup> On this scene, see Charles Dédéyan, ‘Noël Du Fail et les femmes d’après *Les Propos rustiques*’, *Annales de Bretagne*, 51 (1944), 206–17 (p. 215).

<sup>52</sup> Randle Cotgrave defines ‘attenu’ as ‘[b]ound, or beholden to’ (*A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues*, (London: Adam Islip, 1611), s.v. *attenu*).

métayer (titulaire d'un bail "à mi-fruit")' (p. 93, n. 12). Although literally what Du Fail writes means, 'Leave us alone and we'll each have a share in producing good corn', it seems to have a figurative sense along the lines of, 'Leave us alone and we'll do well.' Thenot bids the mother go away, suggesting that their male pursuits have a purpose she cannot comprehend. He is repeating what generations of men before him have said; nevertheless, his humour here seems less tolerant than that displayed in the chapter as a whole. Although the author's general attitude towards his characters may be fairly benign, it does not prevent him from placing harsh words in their mouths. Women are elsewhere addressed sharply by the men. Chapter 5, for instance, tells of Robin Chevet and his wife. He pours (amusing) insults on her as she cries, saying she is 'un diable coiffé' (p. 77), namely, with a reference to her headgear, the devil incarnate. He does, however, make amends in bed (p. 78).

<P>Men, too, are frequently mocked, by the apposite choice of a word or phrase: in Chapter 4, a half-naked slumbering peasant is assailed by his cat, which 'donnoit deux coups de sa patte à ses triquedondaines qui pendoient' (p. 70). The very sound of 'triquedondaines' makes the man appear ridiculous. Maistre Huguet 'ha rosty en beaucoup de cuysines, mengé pain de divers maistres, vertevellé en plusieurs huisseries' (p. 53): the three picturesque expressions imply that his life has been rather a jumble. The inhabitants of Flameaux say that those from Vindelles are 'yvres de laict caillé' (p. 108), suggesting they are like children behaving badly; one of the taunts wielded in return is 'qu'ilz n'avoient que le bec', that those from Flameaux spend their time talking (p. 108). The Vindelois advance on Flameaux, warning 'nous ne sommes icy venuz (ainsi que savez) pour enfiler Patenostres!' (p. 112): they have not come like geriatrics to engage in otiose pursuits, idleness being a supreme crime in the peasants' universe. Robin Chevet is described after a meal, 'le ventre tendu comme un tabourin' (p. 72); Anselme later reports Perrot Claquedent as saying, 'Je suis

saoul, j'ai le ventre tendu comme un tabourin à cordes!' (p. 146). The image underlines the peasants' fondness for drink: Du Fail's proverbs have a satirical edge.

<P>In a short passage of dialogue in Chapter 7, reported by Pasquier but presented dramatically in direct speech and included within the overarching conversation in this multi-layered text, a neighbour asks Thenot how he can possibly let the birds destroy his crop, and exclaims, 'Par la vertu saint Gris, si c'estoit moy...!' (p. 92). 'Ventre saint Gris' (which the neighbour makes into something a little more refined) was a popular sixteenth-century oath — another of Du Fail's characters, Brelin, uses it in Chapter 10 (p. 128), as does Perrot Claquedent in Chapter 12 (p. 145). According to the *Dictionnaire du moyen français*, this oath referred to St Francis of Assisi with his unbleached, undyed woollen habit.<sup>53</sup> The allusion is apposite, as St Francis was known for his love of nature and animals, and was often depicted with birds, or indeed with a bird in his hand. Thenot's compassion is, it is suggested, almost saintly.

<P>After playing with young Pasquier, the friends in Chapter 7 make for home, as it is dusk.<sup>54</sup> Once at home, they 'se mettoient comme deux Fourbisseurs vis à vis l'un de l'autre' (p. 94). This is explained by Cotgrave: 'Teste à teste comme deux fourbisseurs.

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<sup>53</sup> Algirdas Julien Greimas and Teresa Mary Keane, *Dictionnaire du moyen français* (Paris: Larousse, 2001), s.v. 'gris', p. 335. See also Edmond Huguet, *Dictionnaire de la langue française du seizième siècle*, 7 vols (Paris: Édouard Champion, then Honoré Champion, then Didier, 1925-67) (, IV (PARIS: DIDIER, 1950), s.v. 'gris', p. 384. Huguet refers to an occurrence of the oath 'Sang saint Gris' in Rabelais's *Quart Livre* (Chapter 9: Xenomanes is speaking); Mireille Huchon and François Moreau, in their note to this, say simply, 'Juron d'origine inconnue' (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p. 1512). Pierre Enckell includes the oath in his *Dictionnaire des jurons* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004), s.v. 'ventre saint gris', pp. 686–88, referring to its complex history. (In 1897, the colour of the Franciscans' habit was standardized as brown by Pope Leo XIII.)

<sup>54</sup> When the overarching storytelling is over, the characters will return 'chacun à sa chacunière' (*Propos rustiques*, ed. by Pérouse and Dubuis, p. 154).

(*Which commonly worke with their heads close together.*)<sup>55</sup> Du Fail adds, ‘car tous deux mettoient très bien le nez au barril, s’il en estoit question’ (p. 94). Although there is no definitive proof of this in the principal dictionaries of sixteenth-century French, there does seem to be a pun here, which works also in English: the *barril* is at once a cask containing liquor and the barrel of a firearm (more usually a *barillet*). Polishers look closely at the firearm they are working on, but also pay close attention to any barrel of drink that may be available: Du Fail is again satirizing bibulous peasants. As Walter Redfern astutely writes: ‘The pun brings together, serioludically but forcefully, parts normally kept distinct [...]. It melds formal similarity, whether graphic or acoustic, with semantic variance (divergence, conflict, or overlaying).’<sup>56</sup> He adds: ‘Puns stem from, and incite, mental agility’ (ibid.). This mental agility is a prime feature of the *Propos rustiques* and it is certainly demanded of the reader. It could be argued that the text is composed at a moment when playing on words is still relatively innocuous, untainted by the Wars of Religion.<sup>57</sup>

Towards the end of Chapter 7, Du Fail uses a phrase echoing Rabelais to evoke the rest of Thenot’s life and his death, signalling to alert readers his debt to the great comic doctor-writer but also his independence of him: ‘vesquit jusques à la mort en despit des Medecins’ (p. 96); compare *Gargantua*, Chapter 21: ‘Le pape Alexandre [...] vesquit jusques

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<sup>55</sup> Philipot detects here an echo of the *Pionnier de Seurdre*, a dramatic monologue recited in Angers in 1524: see *La Vie et l’œuvre littéraire de Noël du Fail*, p. 203, n. 1. There is an edition of the *Pionnier de Seurdre* by Jehan Daniel and Émile Picot (Paris: H. Leclere and P. Cornuan, 1896).

<sup>56</sup> Walter Redfern, *French Laughter: Literary Humour from Diderot to Tournier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 207.

<sup>57</sup> Bruce Hayes writes: ‘In a progressively divided society, the ambiguities of wordplay, puns, and jokes become more suspicious and less tolerated. Derogatory and sarcastic quips become bitter, as the *risus sardonicus* comes to be the more dominant form of laughter produced by the fanatical pamphleteers on either side of the divide.’ See Hayes, ‘The *Affaire des placards*, Polemical Humour, and the Sardonic Laugh’, *French Studies*, 70 (2016), 332–47 (p. 341).

à la mort, en despit des envieux.’<sup>58</sup> Du Fail’s introduction of a swipe at doctors adds a mischievous satirical touch anticipating writers such as Montaigne and Molière. It recalls Maître Huguet’s recommendation of herbs, knowledge of which is passed down from father to son; they are, he proclaims, superior to doctors’ ‘clisteres, purgations, saignées et telles badauderies’ (p. 68).

<P>When Thenot dies, his son, the aptly named Tailleboudin, ‘meit tout par escuelles’ (p. 96), literally ‘put everything in dishes’, or perhaps ‘put everything out as food for the dogs’, meaning that he squandered everything. Cotgrave quotes the phrase, glossing it in his typically picturesque fashion as ‘(As we say) to throw the house out at windowes’.<sup>59</sup> It is found for instance in *Gargantua*, Chapter 4, although it has a far less pejorative sense here, as Grandgousier, inviting people to a feast of tripe, ‘commendoit que tout allast par escuelles’ (p. 17). Du Fail suggests through the echo the contrast between gigantic generosity and a pointless, brazen wastefulness that is totally different from Thenot’s quiet industriousness. There is perhaps also an echo of Panurge in Chapter 2 of the *Tiers Livre*, as he invited everybody to feasts and ‘mangeoit son bled en herbe’; but Tailleboudin is considerably less hospitable and more threatening.

<P>These examples, centred on Chapter 7, form a very small sample of Du Fail’s colourful oral style. He frequently echoes Rabelais, especially *Gargantua*, in the *Propos rustiques*, but he employs many figures of speech for which there is no parallel in Rabelais. (Indeed, the name Tailleboudin may well have been borrowed by Rabelais from Du Fail, as it occurs in the *Quart Livre*, Chapter 37, four years after the publication of the *Propos rustiques*.<sup>60</sup>) Although popular sayings and concrete turns of phrase are not uncommon in

<sup>58</sup> See Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Huchon and Moreau, p. 56. Gargantua is speaking.

<sup>59</sup> Pérouse and Dubuis (*Propos rustiques*, p. 96, n. 22) refer to the dictionary of Huguet, who found the expression in Calvin.

<sup>60</sup> See *Propos rustiques*, ed. by Pérouse and Dubuis, pp. 96–97, n. 1.



literature and speech, it is instructive to bear in mind parallels with Du Fail's style in medieval literature: notably the *Libvre du bon Jehan, duc de Bretagne*, composed around 1385 by Guillaume de Saint-André, a Breton whose name comes from Saint-André-des-Eaux, near to Guérande and Saint-Nazaire, and who is very aware of there being a specific Breton territory.<sup>61</sup> This clerk in the ducal chancellery writes of the Duke of Brittany, Jean IV, in 4,305 octosyllabic lines that, although diffuse, are clear and quite compelling. The topics dealt with are important and include notably the question of succession. Yet Saint-André peppers his verse with familiar expressions; an example is found in lines 263–64: 'Et leur convient vivre en exill | Et aler cuillir pierresill', where gathering parsley represents penury and aimlessness. One might also think of the *rhétoricien* Jean Meschinot, who was born near Clisson in 1420 and wrote at the court of the dukes of Brittany. His most famous work was *Les Lunettes des princes*, composed between 1461 and 1464, but published posthumously in 1493 (Nantes, Étienne Larcher).<sup>62</sup> The title is amusingly concrete; the first two lines contain two proverbs ('Après beau temps vient la pluie et tempeste; | Plaings, pleurs, souspirs viennent après grant feste'). They must suffice in this brief article to indicate Meschinot's taste for concrete expressions, even though the subject of his text is spiritual

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<sup>61</sup> See the edition by E. Charrière, *Chronique de Bertrand Du Guesclin par Cuvelier*, 2 tomes (Paris: Firmin Didot frères, 1839), t. II, 421-558. There is also a modern edition, *Chronique de l'État breton: 'Le bon Jehan' et 'Le Jeu des échecs': XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. by Jean-Michel Cauneau and Dominique Philippe (Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2005). A translation into modern French is provided alongside the original versions. I am grateful to David Dominé-Cohn for directing me to this important and entertaining text.

<sup>62</sup> See Meschinot, *Les Lunettes des princes*, ed. by Bernard Toscani (Paris: Minard, 1971), and Meschinot, *Les Lunettes des princes*, ed. by Christine Martineau-Génieys (Geneva: Droz, 1972). The latter has a good critical apparatus.

salvation.<sup>63</sup> In spite of such similarities involving widely read works by Breton writers Du Fail may or may not have consulted, it is clear that he has a whimsical turn of phrase and a love of proverbs (some of them presumably regional) that are entirely his own.<sup>64</sup> More work remains to be done on Du Fail's style and vocabulary, including, for instance, a region-based study of his figurative expressions.

<P>In conclusion, readers of the *Propos rustiques* immediately realize that Du Fail is skilled at drawing characters, at evoking their words, and sketching their gestures.<sup>65</sup> He invents amusingly appropriate names for his peasants — apart from those mentioned, such as Perrot Claquedent, there is, for instance, Gobemousche (Chapter 13). Du Fail is able to conjure up a vivid picture of childhood, producing an evocation rare in his day. He is also a self-conscious author: he incorporates in his work reflections on its functions, which include engaging the readers' spirit of play and instilling in them an appreciation of country life; this self-awareness, which modern theories of humour help to discern, has not hitherto been emphasized by critics. His smile is a manifestation of his tolerance of the foibles of human nature (to which his work as a lawyer exposed him); he examines his own humour critically. He depicts with verve not only fights in some respects reminiscent of Rabelais, but vegetable-growing with its attendant perils, the measuring of time in a primitive society, and — throughout the *Propos rustiques* — the chattering of country folk who are not without their eccentricities. He praises agricultural life and gives pride of place to the spoken word. In these two elements — the agricultural and the oral — there is not only something Breton but

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<sup>63</sup> The first proverb is contained in Antoine Le Roux de Lincy, *Le Livre des proverbes français*, 2 vols (Paris: Paulin, 1842), I, 116; the second is found in Joseph Morawski, *Proverbes français antérieurs au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1925; reprinted 2007), p. 109.

<sup>64</sup> In the *Baliverneries* there are more echoes of *Pantagruel* and the *Tiers Livre*; but much seems original.

<sup>65</sup> See Philipot, *La Vie et l'œuvre littéraire de Noël du Fail*, pp. 525–26.

something typically French. He deploys a rich language full of popular expressions that contribute to his lively humour and that seem to owe something to the region in which he is writing. Only a full-scale linguistic study could do this particular topic justice.